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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 003707

SIPDIS

STATE PASS TO AIT/W

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TAGS: [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: TAIWAN'S CULTURAL CRISIS

REF: A. A. TAIPEI 02297

[B. B. TAIPEI 03604](#)

Classified By: AIT DIRECTOR DOUGLAS PAAL; REASON 1.4 (B/D)

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: Recent conversations with Taiwan artists and academics have revealed their growing concern that the ruling DPP's political drive to create a new national identity has created a battleground in the arenas of art and education. Artists and officials alike lament the fact that culture is not being viewed as a means to unite Taiwan's polarized public, but as yet another weapon on the political battleground. Our contacts agree that the DPP's political agenda is, at a minimum, limiting the development of art, film and education. At a maximum, they say the government is making cynical use of a different sense of identity between Taiwan's younger and older generations in order to further its political goal of independence. END SUMMARY.

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Government Support of the Arts (or Lack Thereof)  
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[12.](#) (C) Cultural Minister Chen Chi-nan and Taiwan's Council for Cultural Affairs (CCA), have written a new mission statement to guide cultural and art policies: Taiwan is "facing a hard time of ethnic confrontation and national identification" and "hopes culture and art can be a unifying force." According to contacts in the cultural and educational field, despite this mission statement the government is taking politically motivated and divisive actions to alter Taiwan's cultural identity. By way of example, Liao Hsien-hao, Taipei City's Cultural Bureau Commissioner, points to the CCA's decision to withdraw funding from organizations which include references to "Republic of China" in their mission statements or names. He also decries the government decision to rename organizations-- like the Han and Tang dance troupe-- or rewrite traditions-- the Dragon Boat races as a celebration of river gods as opposed to the original association with China's poet Qiu Yuan. He believes the goal of the policy is to desinicize Taiwan and ultimately increase the distance between its people and Mainland China.

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Camouflaging Taiwan's Cultural Identity  
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[13.](#) (C) While some of our contacts would argue that these actions are necessary in order to compensate for decades of KMT control and repression of non-Han culture, Liao and others view the DPP actions as an attempt to redefine Taiwan's identity for political purposes. In their eyes the DPP's efforts to define a separate Taiwan identity, which excludes Han Chinese culture, ignores the reality of Taiwan's multi-cultural society. They view the DPP's effort to create a new consensus on the definition of Taiwan culture as an attempt to redefine what representing the people of Taiwan means. Under this strategy, the KMT is viewed not only as the historical oppressor, but also as a party representing a foreign culture. The DPP, by defining culture and art in such narrow terms as to exclude or camouflage any Han Chinese content, has succeeded in alienating those artists whose performance or artwork is steeped in such content. Many of these artists have refused to change the content or name of their organization because of their affinity to Han culture. According to many contacts the CCA's support of art and culture, so narrowly defined, has failed to unify Taiwan society and only succeeded in limiting artistic expression and development.

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Taiwan's Foundering Film Industry:  
A Victim of Politics or Free Trade?  
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[14.](#) (C) Robert Chen, Director of the Graduate School of Applied Media arts at the National Taiwan University of the Arts, and a DPP supporter, points to the decline in Taiwan's film industry as a concern largely ignored by a government content to embrace "all things international." Chen and some aspiring young film directors we have met believe Taiwan is in a unique position to be a leader in cultural content in

Asia, but has fallen behind Singapore and Mainland China, even though directors and producers there are subject to government control. In their eyes, the DPP leadership has failed both to protect Taiwan's nascent film industry from international competition and to recognize the potential film and art offer to help forge a Taiwan identity. They argue that Taiwan, unlike South Korea, gave up any protection for its film industry, under U.S. pressure, in order to join the WTO. As a result Taiwan's films are not commercially viable even in their own theaters while U.S., Korean, and Japanese films flood the market.

15. (C) While there are numerous explanations for the decline of Taiwan's film industry, many local contacts focus on the damage domestic politics has done to Taiwan's cultural community. Many are quick to point out that artists have been criticized if they try to maintain a neutral political position. Hou Hsiao-hsien, a significant and important Taiwanese director whose previous films depicted life and change in Taiwan society, was accused of not "loving Taiwan enough" and consequently turned to Japan for funding, actors, and support for his next film.

16. (C) Young artists and directors say that they have had to ask themselves over the past few years whether or not their subjects or the content of their films would be supported by the CCA. Wu Yi-feng, a film director and founder of the Full Shot Communication Foundation, points to the controversy surrounding his latest film as an example of the politicization of culture. His documentary film, "Life" which follows the stories of several Taiwan families following the massive devastation of Taiwan's 1999 earthquake, has generated great public interest and is currently touring the island. With its success have come numerous requests for Wu to participate in political campaigns and, on the occasion of National Day, President Chen Shui-bian openly praised the film. To his dismay, Wu believes his film has been unfairly labeled a "Pan-Green" film although it contains no political content. Pan-Blue legislators accused the government of trying to brainwash bureaucrats by screening the movie in Executive Yuan (EY) agencies. According to Wu, when the movie was not included in the Golden Horse competition, the Pan-Green media went on to accuse the competition's chairman of political partisanship and for not "loving Taiwan enough" despite prior knowledge that his film could not be included in the Golden Horse competition because it was shot with digital video as opposed to 35 millimeter film.

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Preservation of Indigenous Culture: Education or Commodity?  
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17. (C) The CCA has described as part of its mission, in collaboration with the education ministry, to support the development and cultural preservation of the indigenous peoples of Taiwan. According to Tian Ming-sheu, a professor at the Graduate Institute of Compulsory Education at the National Hualien Teachers College and a member of the central government ministry of education, over 20 billion NT dollars has been spent to support the development of schools in areas which have fallen behind the national average. Many of these schools are located in remote areas that are home to Taiwan's aboriginal peoples. Tian believes much of this funding has been misspent, particularly with regard to improving the education of Taiwan indigenous people. Instead of focusing on their history, students in these areas, regardless of ethnicity, are being forced from grade school on to take time away from studies to prepare for performances to showcase native aboriginal dance and dress. School principals in Hualien, during a discussion of Taiwan's cultural identity, expressed extreme anger and frustration with the central government, which they describe as having done little to improve the lives of the indigenous people while at the same time exploiting their traditional dance and dress to promote a new Taiwanese identity. Professor Tien Tai-wu, Director of the Institute of Ethnic Relations and Culture at National Dong Hwa University and frequent speaker on the issue of national identity in Taiwan, has raised the concerns of Taiwan's indigenous peoples to the central government with little success. She says she remains pessimistic about the government's motives because specific educational needs are often ignored in favor of spending on cultural performance events and conferences.

18. (C) COMMENT: Polls show that Taiwan's youth already have a stronger identification with Taiwan than their parents' generation (Ref A). The government is clearly attempting to capitalize on or actively encourage the growth of this trend to create a uniquely Taiwanese identity in arts and education. The DPP's objectives are two-fold. Emphasizing Taiwan's separate identity appeals to its core support base. Programs that enhance the prominence of Hakka and Aboriginal culture are calibrated to expand that base by attracting ethnic groups that previously voted Blue (Ref B). Whether or

not this effort is simply partisan politics, or one further step towards the larger political goal of creating a separate Taiwan identity different than China is a matter of debate. In the meantime, many artists and academics feel that while a new cultural policy could have been a unifying, inclusive force, they say in reality it is having the effect of politicizing and polarizing the arts and education communities in the way that politics has polarized Taiwan society as a whole.

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